



STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice

FR: J.B. Van Hollen, Attorney General

DT: March 18, 2010

RE: 2009 Assembly Bill 785

Dear Members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice:

Please accept the attached written testimony in support of Assembly Bill 785 related to creating an integrated crime alert network at the Department of Justice. Similar testimony was also delivered to the members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Corrections, Insurance, Campaign Finance Reform, and Housing when a public hearing was held on Senate Bill 533, the companion bill to Assembly Bill 785, on February 18, 2010.

Thank you.



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TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice

FR: Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen

DT: March 18, 2010

RE: Written Testimony in Support of 2009 Assembly Bill 785

Chairman Turner, members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Assembly Bill 785. This bill would enable us to implement the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network, a new statewide public safety initiative that we have developed at the Department of Justice.

At the Department of Justice, we exist to assist local law enforcement in our mutual mission to fight crime and enhance public safety. We do this in many ways. One way that we do this is by sharing information. For example, every day the Wisconsin Statewide Information Center analyzes and disseminates to the hundreds of law enforcement agencies throughout law enforcement information about unique criminal activity or missing children. By increasing the number of law enforcement aware of a particular criminal trend or enterprise, we increase our chances of capturing suspects or preventing a crime before it occurs. Better information to more law enforcement about criminal activity helps law enforcement protect all of us from crime.

The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network takes the concept of electronic information sharing a step further by providing information to those private entities affected by crime on a regular basis. By providing appropriate information to private citizens about criminal activity, law enforcement increases its eyes and ears, resulting in more suspects being caught and more missing children being recovered.

Here is how it will work. Law enforcement trained by the Department of Justice to use the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network would send out messages to participating businesses and members of the community about criminal activity, criminal trends, or missing persons. By using a drop down menu, those messages can be distributed to specific geographic regions—or even statewide—and specify the type of private entity to receive the message. Participants and law enforcement would then receive an email or fax with the message. Alerted and armed with information, participants can be on the lookout for unusual behavior or identified suspects. This will help them protect themselves—and help them alert law enforcement.

The concept of law enforcement sharing information about criminal activity with affected members of the local community is not new. What is new is the capability to efficiently transmit information to different regions throughout the state so that members of all potentially affected communities. We should take advantage of that capability.

Take for example a series of prescription drug thefts from pharmacies in Southeastern Wisconsin. An alert could be sent out by the responding local law enforcement agency to pharmacies in the region who are members of the network. The alerts could carry images from security cameras or descriptions of suspects, allowing pharmacies to be on the lookout for the suspects. By reporting suspicious activity to police, pharmacies can protect themselves, their inventory, and ultimately those individuals who might become hooked on the stolen prescription drugs that would have been otherwise distributed at a local high school.

Another example to cite could be scrap metal theft in Merrill. It isn't enough to notify the community in Lincoln County that a scrap metal theft has occurred. The thief may go elsewhere to liquidate his stolen goods. By notifying the participating businesses that purchase and process scrap metal in Milwaukee, for example, they can be on the lookout for the stolen goods described in a crime alert. When the thief attempts to sell to them, law enforcement can be contacted.

Sometimes statewide distribution will be appropriate. Take for example an abducted child. An alert containing pictures of the child could be sent throughout the network, and those on the lookout can report sightings to law enforcement. It was this very scenario that alerted me to how truly life saving a statewide crime alert network could be. In 2007, the Department of Justice issued an amber alert. It was believed the abductor was taking the children north or northwest. Before the missing children could be recovered in Wisconsin, their abductor had taken them to Minnesota. Thankfully, Minnesota has a crime alert network similar to the one I am endorsing today. Information contained in the Wisconsin amber alert was transmitted over Minnesota's network. A participating hotel received the alert, and hotel staff recognized the suspect from the crime alert message when the suspect checked in to the hotel. Hotel staff contacted area law enforcement and the children were recovered safely.

Assembly Bill 785 authorizes the creation of the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network. Creation of the system will not require any general revenue. It authorizes the Department of Justice to charge a nominal fee to those private entities that choose to participate. In Minnesota, where a similar network has been in existence for over 15 years, over 7,000 businesses are currently members and pay just \$12 a year to participate. One dollar per month to assist law enforcement in the apprehension of suspects—and to make their businesses and communities safer. Linking law enforcement with businesses creates a web of safety that each of our communities deserve. The network has been used in the apprehension of suspects who have been responsible for more than \$3 million worth of crimes including forgery, theft and burglary. It has also assisted in locating at least 10 missing people.

~~I believe in this initiative. Once launched, I believe businesses will participate and do so in~~
broad numbers. Every business group I or my staff has met with has indicated strong support and a belief that many of their members would enthusiastically participate. That makes sense. Businesses have an intrinsic interest in participating. Not only can they help protect their staff, their community, and their inventory by participating, but safer streets enhances business. It should never be forgotten that reducing crime and enhancing public safety is a critical component of healthy local economies.

Most recently, this proposal received bipartisan support during the past biennial budget cycle. The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network was placed in the budget by the Joint Committee on Finance and it passed both houses. Unfortunately, Governor Doyle vetoed it.

This session, the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Corrections, Insurance, Campaign Finance Reform, and Housing passed the Senate companion to Assembly Bill 785 on a unanimous vote.

This program has the ability to make each and every one of your districts safer. Increasing the eyes and ears of law enforcement is a major step to make all of our communities safer. I urge you all to support this legislation.



ANN HRAYCHUCK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**Testimony of Rep. Ann Hraychuck
Before the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice
Regarding Assembly Bill 785**

Good morning, Chairman Turner and committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to provide you with information about Assembly Bill 785.

This bill establishes the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network (CAN), an initiative that provides local law enforcement the ability to quickly alert the business community and the general public about a crime trend or a suspect that may threaten them or their business.

Last session, this bill received broad support from a wide range of business and law enforcement groups. It passed the Assembly Criminal Justice Committee and the Senate Committee on Small Business, Emergency Preparedness, Technical Colleges, and Consumer Protection unanimously. It also passed the Assembly on a voice vote.

I want to thank Rep. Garey Bies for his efforts on this legislation both last session and this session. I also appreciate the Attorney General taking time to testify today in support of this bill.

Participation in the Crime Alert Network is voluntary. Law enforcement officials send out electronic communications to targeted businesses and members of the community. For example, in the event of a series of ephedrine-product pharmacy robberies in northwestern Wisconsin, an alert could be sent out by each responding agency to pharmacies in the region who are members of the network. By providing information to the business community about criminal activity, law enforcement can increase its eyes and ears, while at the same time protecting local businesses.

The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network requires no state GPR funding. The system will be started with Department of Justice discretionary settlement funds and will be funded on a continuing basis with the annual membership fees from the network's participants. This proposal is modeled after Minnesota's Crime Alert Network, which has been in place for over a decade and is also self-funded by voluntary participants.

The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network will take communication between law enforcement and the people they serve to a new level in Wisconsin. Thank you for your consideration.



SENATOR JEFF PLALE
SEVENTH SENATE DISTRICT

CHAIR
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, UTILITIES, ENERGY, AND RAIL

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Testimony of Senator Jeff Plale

Assembly Bill 785

Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice

March 18, 2010

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Thank you, Representative Turner and fellow members of the committee, for your consideration of Assembly Bill 785.

I am very pleased to testify in favor of this important bill that would create the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network.

An integral component of crime prevention is having an informed citizenry that can act as another pair of eyes and ears for the police. The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network will be an effective tool for law enforcement and business owners in the prevention of crime, while improving and maintaining public safety for all residents of our state.

The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network would provide local law enforcement the ability to quickly alert the business community and the general public about a trend in crime or a suspect that may affect them or their business. Businesses and members of the public would have the opportunity to voluntarily subscribe to the Crime Alert Network for a nominal fee. These participating members would receive electronic communications from DOJ trained law enforcement personnel that could be selected by region or type of business.

In crafting this legislation, the Minnesota model provided helpful framework for our bill and I anticipate that the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network will be just as successful. Established in 1995, the Minnesota Crime Alert Network has facilitated the capture of over 60 criminals who caused nearly \$3 million of damage in property crimes. Over 10,000 Minnesota businesses participate and pay about \$12 per year to receive the alerts.

As you can see from our list of co-sponsors, AB785 has garnered widespread bi-partisan support in both houses of the legislature. Increased public safety and crime prevention are laudable goals that implementation of the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network would help us achieve across the state. By providing information to the business community about criminal activity, law enforcement increases its eyes and ears, more suspects are caught, and more runaways are recovered. I hope you will join me in supporting AB 785.

Thank you for your time and consideration of AB 785. I am happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this bill.

